

## Historic, archived document

Do not assume content reflects current scientific knowledge, policies, or practices.



HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT

Wednesday, November 20, 1935

(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

Subject: "THE HOLIDAY BIRD." Information from the Bureau of Agricultural Economics and the Bureau of Animal Industry, United States Department of Agriculture.

--ooOoo--

The question before the house this morning is what bird to serve on the Thanksgiving platter. It's not a bit too early to settle that question with the big day only one week away.

If you are a strong believer in good old American customs and traditions, you'll vote for ~~turkey~~ always without a second thought. But if you are in the habit of suiting your menus to the size of your family or your pocketbook, or if you like to be original and different about holiday dishes, then you may choose some other bird or even some cut of meat. Anyway, you'll be wise to make your choice early and put in your order at the market in time to get the kind of meat you want and the best quality.

The poultry men at the Department of Agriculture in Washington have some news that may help you make your decision. They say that this year's crop of turkeys is smaller than last year's crop. And you know, last year's crop was less than normal. The drought last year is responsible in large measure for the lowered turkey population this year. Turkey growers had to sell off their turkeys for lack of feed or because of the high price of feed. And the population hasn't recovered yet. But what turkeys we have this year are heavier. You'll find more big birds on the market. So the total amount of turkey will be about the same. Still turkey prices will probably be somewhat higher this year than last.

If you have a large family, you'll be glad to hear the news that so many big turkeys are on the market. But if your family numbers less than 6 or 8, well, you'll find that the situation isn't quite so pleasing. The small birds under 10 pounds in weight will be scarce and more expensive.

But if you have a small family and want turkey in spite of a little addition in price, your most suitable buy will be a young hen turkey weighing anywhere from 9 to 12 pounds.

If you are inclined to be thrifty about your Thanksgiving dinner, you'll probably choose chicken or duck for a small family, and chicken, goose or turkey for a large group. From late September or October until late December, our largest supply of fresh roasting chicken comes on the market. (Of course, roasters and stewers are both cheaper at this time of year than broilers or fryers, which come earlier in the season.) Roasting chicken like turkey is scarcer and higher in price this year than last -- and for the same reason.



Many people had to sell their flocks last year because of the drought. But even with higher prices, a roaster makes a more economical buy for a small family than a turkey because you can buy less weight and thus suit the number you have to serve. Ducks are available in many markets and many people like the dark rich meat of duck. Ducks are always cheaper than turkey, sometimes cheaper than roasting chicken, but you get less meat in proportion to bone. Geese are larger, more suitable to a larger family. But they also give less meat and more bone than a turkey weighing the same amount.

Now here are a few facts about our national Thanksgiving bird. Texas raises more turkeys than any other State in the Union. North Dakota comes next. Then Minnesota and then California. Turkeys thrive best in a dry climate. Alfalfa fields in irrigated regions seem to be the kind of range they enjoy most. The reason a dry climate is so good for turkeys is that they catch cold easily especially when they are young.

Our domestic turkeys now grow as heavy as 32 to 36 pounds. These big birds usually sell for restaurant or steamship trade. For home use the popular weight is from 10 to 15 pounds.

Poultry men of the Department of Agriculture are now at work developing strains of smaller-bodied turkeys, which growers can raise quickly and profitably for Thanksgiving and Christmas markets.

Well-finished young turkey toms usually weigh about 14 to 21 pounds dressed, and young hens weigh 8 to 12 pounds dressed. But many housewives nowadays prefer a smaller bird that would be easier to prepare and cook. A tom fully grown and weighing not more than 15 pounds dressed would answer this demand. I say a tom, because toms are more plentiful on the holiday market than hens which producers often keep for eggs.

Our grandmothers cooked turkeys weighing as much as 24 to 26 pounds dressed. But those were the days of big family gatherings and big kitchens. Cooking ovens and roasting pans and so on are smaller today. So is the average household. Cooking equipment in many homes won't accomodate a dressed turkey if it weighs more than 18 or 20 pounds. Also the needs of most families today are smaller.

So, at the Department's Research Center at Beltsville, Maryland, the poultry men are trying to develop strains of turkeys that will be meatier, lighter in weight, and more compact than those now commonly raised for market. They are using for these breeding experiments different varieties of birds that have short legs, broad backs, and plump bodies.

This same turkey study will include turkey diets. We consumers want a tender but well-fattened turkey. That means a young bird which has been taking in a good many calories in a short time. Since the maximum gains in young turkeys depend on the kind and quantity of food they get, these experimental turkeys at Beltsville will be treated to feasts of various sorts until the most satisfactory diet is discovered.

Yes, and the investigators are also at work on ways to prevent turkey ills. They have already found that such an apparently small matter as the proper tilt off the roosting-board may prevent crooked or dented breastbones in turkeys.

Well, these are just a few glimpses of the work Department of Agriculture men are doing for the health and happiness of the Nation's turkeys and their owners to say nothing of the housewives who cook these birds and finally the families who eat them.

